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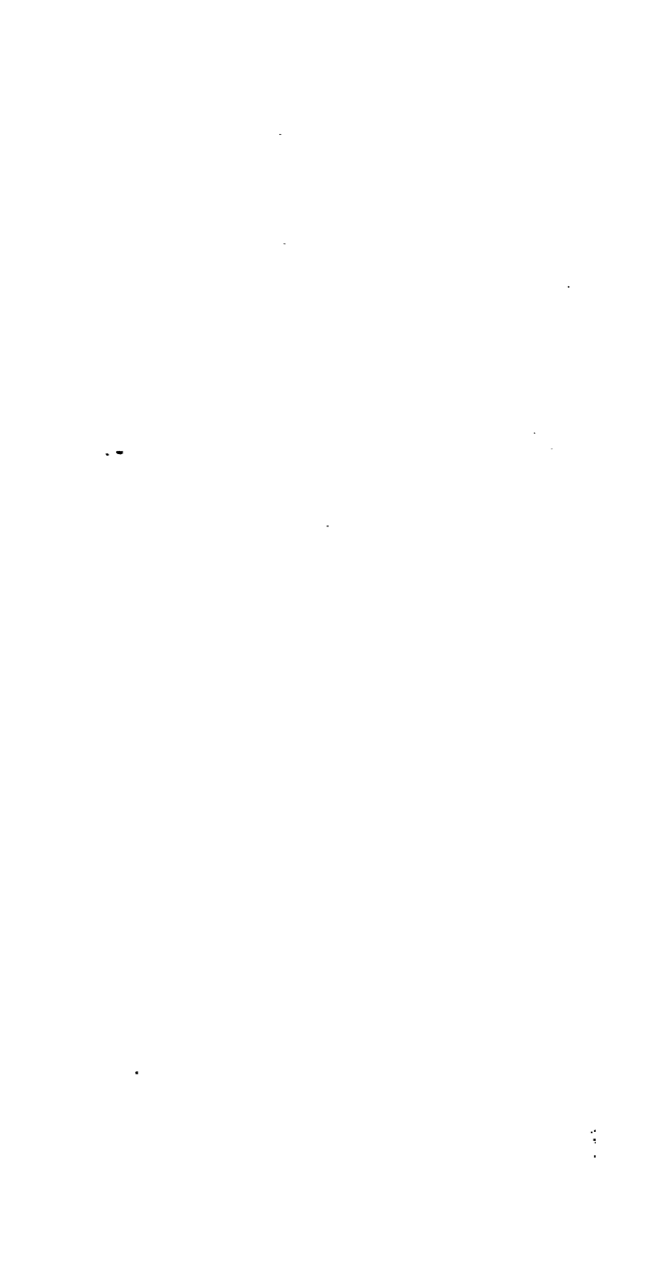
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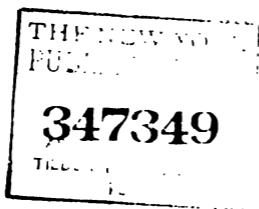
"The under-world receives the image,
The *spirit* seeks the stars."

—OVID.

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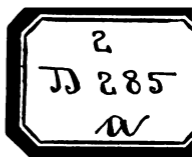
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AT THE THRESHOLD.

CHAPTER I.

A SEVERANCE.

THE last sound that I remember was a sob so tearless, so spirit-racked in its intensity, that memory ushers it in with a tremor,—two warm, living hands grasped mine,—held them with a strength supernatural: “I cannot let you go, no! With such ties between us, nothing can sever our lives. Stay with me!”

It was my husband's voice, and he held me close to his heart.

Through the dimness, gathering film-like upon my vision, were the

forms of loved ones, friends and family.

I outstretched my hands once or twice in mute entreaty.

The warm ones held them fast again,—jealously, fiercely; and with a surging in my ears like waves that kiss the shore, I left them.

From a state of total unconsciousness, I emerged into another being. An attraction, slow, subtle, yet uniform, drew me gently, firmly away from room, home, and country; until a change as marvelous as that that proceeds from a blossomed fruit, was effected. I unclosed my hitherto leaden lids, and looked around.

Beyond the twilight realm, above the glittering spires of the city, I was floating—floating with a grace delightful to comprehend, ecstatic in its newness. A soft wooing light brake upon my vision, and, with the moment's flight, expanded beneath, around,

until it percolated the boundless ether. On either side was an ethereal form with soulful eyes. As they responded, liquidly, the sounds fell upon my ear, like the swept strings of a harp.

“Follow, oh, follow!” enjoined the aërial tongues.

And I obeyed.

“Whither fly we, and wherefore?” questioned I, in wonderment.

“Through countless realms, that exist above us,” assured they, looking upward. “In each silvered point of light, thou seest a peopled region. Many are the inhabitants, yet strangely dissimilar to thy conceptions. Thou hast left thy world forever; its sorrows and buffetings: in exchange we will give thee calm and never-ending delight.”

On we floated. The air whirred with pinions. Each form was surrounded with light as from a star, until the whole atmosphere ap-

peared silvered by the train of flight.

Afar rose the peaks of a country, its shadowy outlines discernible to the eager eye, its interior a surmise of unknown beauty. We were gradually nearing its confines, and my heart leaped with delight.

"We must impose discreetness upon thee, as we traverse the first world," impressed my gentle guides. "Thou hast not left Earth sufficiently long to question; and that, we know, is the prevailing characteristic there. Time, and a new being, will acquaint thee with all the wonders and realms we shall view until thou reachest the Eternal City."

"'The Eternal City'? tell me of it, I beseech thee!" pleaded I.

"Far from these green and flowering isles it lieth, Child of Earth," intoned they; "and its like no ear, tongue, nor eye knoweth, save them that inhabit it. It

is the abode of purity, harmony, and immortal life. Thou canst not hope to attain it until thou hast spent an allotted season within each sphere."

"Shall I surely reach it then, oh, spirits, shall I?"

"Wherefore not? Each longing soul finds refuge there: thy deeds on Earth prepare thee for its abode. Look back on thy life. Recall what thou hast accomplished to merit this new transition."

The words unlocked the door of Memory; stirred the dust from its pictured walls.

Had I valued earthly moments, lived for others, numbered good deeds, triumphed over self?

I bethought me of all the instances crowded into my short life; of the impressions I had left loved ones.

"I know not," I faltered, in revulsion of feeling, "whether I be worthy. I fear much. Yet I

recall victories over self, temptations shunned, and mercy's balm poured from these hands. I know of love implanted in hearts of family and friends, and their lothness to see me depart."

"Thou sayest well," they encouraged; "but canst thou recall one life saved, one cross carried, some deed entitling thee to a starry crown?"

In heaviness of spirit I meditated; bethinking me of the beautiful life awaiting—the one I had desired. I swept the mental walls of all my past, from childhood to womanhood.

"Stay!" exclaimed I; "one thing I remember well."

"Speak, we will attend," replied they.

"In my girlhood, I struggled against a fate that pursued me; that imposed chains of doubt, discord, and bitter unrest. Night after night, day after day, my streaming eyes made moist the

ground, my heavy heart lay like a weight within my breast.

“One day a pilgrim passed; on his brow, peace; in his eye, kindness.

“‘Why art thou tortured thus?’ questioned he.

“‘I know not; I would I might be free!’ And my imploring eyes were raised to his.

“‘Hearken,’ said he; ‘my name is Morality. I go through the world, over highways and hedges, through morass and bramble, seeking the good my hand can do; distributing blessings on those I meet. Wilt thou go with me?’

“Heart and eyes answered ‘yes’; thereupon the stranger burst my bonds.”

“What then?” asked my guides.

“Free and untrammelled I arose; shook off the chains and heart-heaviness, as a garment, and wended my way beside the pilgrim’s, through thorny paths and stony footings.

“On the road we met numerous pedestrians. Many toiled under heavy burdens — children and youth, middle-aged and decrepit. Some faces wore a look of pain; on others, discontent lay darkly.

“‘Address them with kindness,’ said my companion; ‘make their hearts lighter.’

“The sight of them roused all the compassion, sympathy, and interest in my nature. I assisted them in bearing the burdens that inclined them to the ground; made their traveling less irksome, the outlook more hopeful.

“Thus passed the hours. The faces gradually lost the lines of care; lightened hearts looked from their eyes; and the steps gave promise of buoyancy.

“‘Thou hast saved us from dangers that encompassed us,’ assured they, ‘from despair and death. See, above the purple mountain-tops new light is breaking! It streameth upon our feet

ard way, and the road becometh
earer, wider, and more accessible.
'e shall reach our journey's
id. We shall leave sorrow and
re on the road.'

"Soon we left them, and jour-
eyed homeward.

" 'Art thou happier?' asked the
lgrim. 'Doth the joy uprising
those hearts communicate with
ine?' And his eyes scanned
arnestly my face.

" 'Yes,' answered I, 'in all good
es relief—a freedom from unrest.
n mercy's touch is self dispelled.
enewed am I in vigor, spirit,
nd step. I shall live in this
emembrance of others.'

"And thus it was. My pilgrim-
ge fitted me for my latter end,
nd instilled dominant energy and
isdom into all I essayed."

"We rejoice in thy narration,"
nourished my guides. "Upward
ow, and forever!"

And we reached the first world.



CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST SPHERE.



AN atmosphere of
lowness surrounds
An azure ether above
our vision, over
fleecy clouds gambol
like flocks of sheep shepherded
by the winds.

Hillocks of green relieve
levelings, at whose base
silver streams, wherein
we behold our dazzling forms.
Cool shades begotten
of the interlacing branches
of graceful trees and
sapsugared us to linger.
Wood-violets,
crocuses, and anemones
interwoven as into a carpet
under our feet, while over all
beams the serenity of heavenly light.

From unseen hands music vibrated upon the air, like Æolian swells of rapture, bidding the spirit rejoice in an entranced existence.

Presently we came to a group of inhabitants wearing flowery garlands on their heads, reclining in unstudied grace by the streamlet's brink. Their breathing words were like tinkling silver bells.

I drew near, and inhaled their speech. It inspired me like fresh draughts of morning air, and sped through my veins like an electric current.

"Who are these?" asked I.

"The repentant," replied one of my guides, "who, toward the latter end, cried unto One above, to save, to bless, to receive. He, never spurning a repentant one, bade them come hither; for he knew the eyes that had been in darkness, the influences that had dwarfed and stunted the soul's growth."

“Why then linger they here? Surely they should ascend. Never have I beheld such calm and noble countenances, untraced by slavish human passions.”

“Discipline of will, courage in combat, and psychic inquiry nobly organize and reform the features. The other extremes debauch the senses and impress the outer face. It behooveth these repentant ones to remain a little longer, to purify themselves in these living waters of Faith, Love, and Redemption. Each sphere attracts its own, according to one's life on Earth. Each shall one's station be above.”

“And in former pursuits, when they still delight; and are emotion and success deserving admittance?”

“Not emulation. That belongeth to no sphere of harmony. Success, yes. It belongeth to the spheres of the highest spheres. It starbells our countenances, guides our steps until we pass through the gate

for it signifies victory, and indomitable courage in the ascent."

"We know them forever then?" said I; "it has often perplexed me."

"Canst thou think that Earth is the only abode for elevating, ennobling, and heaven-breathed arts? Whence they came, thither will they return; perfecting as one perfects, delighting as one's powers awaken and unfold to light above. An attainment, a talent, never dies; rather adds and adds until it is established as a heavenly product."

"Where range the Arts? Where abide the souls of Music, Poesy, Sculpture, and Color?"

"Beyond several worlds; in a sphere that is the abode of all harmony. There Creative Art abides, entrances, and vitalizes. But we will not tell thee more; thou shalt learn thyself."

I was happy. My existence

had become a floating reality and the old, old life below gradually returned to my consciousness. Yet I harbored no regrets recalled no sorrows, cares, or discords. My new transition was too complete; the spiritual was stronger than the material.

Too often would my heart revert to loved ones. I could touch them with my hands; breathe into their ears through illimitable space: and I felt they caught the whisper. I did not long for them to come to me. I knew the blossom would be spared for the fruit,—the fruit would ripen in due season.

But there was one assurance I longed to share with others. It was that of "passing away"; of casting the old garment of flesh aside, as a husk from the corn, a shell from the nut. I had made no acquaintance with the King of Terrors; he was a myth and a delusion.

When my eyes opened, the Celestial Beings had been in direct view, within reach of my arm, which needed no staying. The sphere into which we had wandered, held beings as perfectly formed and organized as on Earth. The belief in spirit as an essence—something intangible, shadowy, contrary in form to the material—was a fallacy. These inhabitants possessed all the faculties, organizations, and minutest fibers that the material form had; the substance was the only difference.

They laughed, spake, moved, and appeared as human beings; but spirituality pervaded each feature, swayed their steps, and buoyed the sense of flight. I seemed in a world, though more beautiful than the one just left, of relative rotundity, magnitude, atmosphere, and all the beauties of the animal, the mineral, and the vegetable kingdoms. It was a real world; nothing illusory or imagi-

nary; and as perceivable to spiritual sense, as the earthly been to my former state.

Here were woods of dense foliage; valleys slumbering in mellow light, like infants in stronger. Skies, trees, plants, rocks, and rivers; but more beautiful in growth, structure, color and substance. Variety about more; excellence predominant.

As the eye approaches creation through the medium of spirit, so the spirit awakes to another sphere to the inherent beauty of its surroundings.

I advanced closely to a group resting beneath the shade of a flowering tree.

They greeted me with kindness and love, and manifested surprise, curiosity, nor eagerness; but received me as awaited, desired, known.

"Thou hast come to us in soul," breathed they, "and know happy hours now.

are sunny slopes, flowered paths, and lanes to traverse as thou deemest enjoyable. Come, thou shalt see."

Past luxuriant bowers, towering trees, and silver lakes we wandered, our tongues discoursing with a grace, simplicity, and intellectuality akin to Earth; yet higher in thought, more virile in expression.

Beneath our feet the new spheres of grass parted, disclosing hiding blossoms that diffused fragrance at proximity of our garments. Field upon field stretched afar, and the tall waving grass nodded a welcome. The hazy light of noon-tide brushed each tree, shrub, and flower; tessellated our path, and kissed the folds of our garments.

"Oh, to dwell forever in this land of perpetual light!" burst from my lips; "where storms never beat on the strand, where rest and peace abide."

“Nay,” exclaimed one, “the soul progresses as doth the body on Earth: as the infant merges into the youth, the youth into the man, and so on. The soul grows and grows, until it becomes like unto One from whom it evolved into being. Art thou not eager to ascend and ascend?”

“Yea, verily! if so it be. Yet, methinks such a wondrous state can scarcely be conceived. The development cometh unawares—stealing as a mist over us.”

“Thou sayest aright,” spake one of my guides, who had been silent during my ecstatic outbreak; “the soul unfolds each petal, like unto a flower through its several stages, until the full blown blossom rests within the Hands above. The atmosphere around, the nourishment from Heaven, and Divine breath nurture it and advance its growth. Not a blemish, stain, nor imperfection mar its beauty when

rests with him. Thou, too, shalt learn some day."

One lightning thought flashed through my being—the power and voice to tell the toilers below, the fainting ones on the road, of the reward each step brought. To explain the hidden problems of life, the immortal awakening, was my one desire.


"It will come soon," came the mental assurance. "My love for them will flash the light of immortality throughout their being, like a beacon-light on a rayless sea."

On we wandered in happy content. Each curling leaf and plant, each turn of the landscape, elicited new bursts of admiration from my parted lips. I beheld no waning evening light, no starry lamps placed above, no coming night. Heaviness, monotony, and unrest abided elsewhere; and the soul sang through unceasingly happy moments.

Near by a slender maiden passed. The face was familiar—one I had known on Earth. The eyes beamed a welcome, and the lips called, "My own friend!"

"Ah!" exclaimed I, "thou knowest me! Thou art here, sweet one! We are together!"

"I have awaited thee anxiously," she replied, "and have watched each step that led thee here. To me was given the delight of guarding thine every step, turning aside thy feet from pitfalls and snares that beset thee on Earth; for the Mighty One hath said: 'He shall give His angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways.' A little band joined me in trust of thee. Thou hast heeded our warnings, frowned contempt and scorn upon evil ones that would intrude, and have thereby merited this new state. Thou also shalt be near thine own after a few days of grace; for it is given to all to



minister through the changing trials below."

My happy heart rose with each loving word. My longings were heard. My prayer had trembled at the foot of the Throne.

At every step we encountered newcomers; familiar faces greeted my eyes, soft hands touched me lovingly on the hands and brow.

On and on we strayed, pausing betimes 'neath the shade of the trees, listening to the trickle of a rivulet's song, or the leaping of a cataract.

Gradually we passed from the little groups, until the limits of the country seemed attained; a distant shore loomed afar.

"Thou wilt soon be coming to another sphere," instructed my guides, "of greater magnitude than the one just viewed. Across this stream it lieth, and its boundaries cannot be swept by the eye or the mind. Come, let us plume our flight to its domain."

With that I arose into the air as lightly as a puff of seed from a dandelion stem. On either side were my graceful gossamer wings. The soft whirring sounded like the summer stillness like wind from liberated zephyrs; as my flight became nearer and less

A fairyland of beauty opened upon our sight. Arching over the top of stately elms and beeches crowned the distance. Small shrubs crept from fissures between the rocks, and lichens clung to the silent strength to the side surfaces.

With the happiness emanating from a resurrected existence, my footprints lingered in the white sand. I knew not the name of the country before us—of its dwellers. I only surmised a peace and unending tranquillity, familiar acquaintanceship with a peaceful sphere. Progress, I knew, would bring greater elation, confidence, and elevation. Like steps in the

rocks my feet had gone; and the ideal of the Above was closely allied to the real; and the surmountable heights drew me with gentle force.

I represented no weary pilgrim in the ascent; but a soul imbibing love, grace, and depth from the well of the Universe about me.

Glorying in my surety, stimulated by nearness to the goal, I found myself and my guides at the second sphere.





CHAPTER III.

THE VICTORIOUS IN WARFARE.

THROUGH an isle of forest oaks we passed, fretted with supernal tinging. In and out danced golden fleckings; and the leaves, mazy tendrils, and spongy sod appealed for notice. Out on the level sward the vermeil-rimmed daisies turned their faces to the sun, and broidered the deep-green herbage with starry pattern.

Intersecting paths, bordered with broad and spidery-leaved ferns, led our footsteps into sequestered glades of grateful stillness. The hiding echoes betrayed our softest words, our

laughter, or caught the whirr of the happy flight of a bird.

Far down the winding glen miniature falls graced a shelving slope; and its cursive cascade gleamed like crystal in the light, and showered diamond spheres upon the adjacent shrubbery.

The tufted crowns of the tree-tops shaded the heads of a band, walking in wreathed happiness beneath the screening majesty.

“How blest are they!” uttered I to my guides; “the very motion of their graceful heads and gliding steps assures me of eternal peace. Tell me of them!” And my vision and hearing were keener in the eagerness for knowledge.

“These are they that restlessly trod the pathways of life; that sipped the honey of Pleasure and Idleness, only to be cloyed by its sweetness. Regretful, awakened to the absence of harmony, which is dimly instilled with principles of good, they crushed Sin beneath

their feet, trampled on by
Vainglory, and Hypocrisy,
lived for a world beyond
narrow limits.

“Above”—and he reverent-
ly extended his tapered finger—“
O God, the One that ever heeds the
cry of contrition; marks the
washed eye. He comprehends
the hitherto dormant prin-
ciple of good, the rich soil that needs
only the plowing of Time, and
has aided them by his grace.”

“None are destined, the
horrors beyond the material
existence?” said I; “there can be
no yawning chasm or burning d
in readiness to receive them

“Not as some contend. In
the first step, with the difficulties
and snares attending it, is known
the beginning of existence.
Some are elected or foreordained
to salvation; for He that forms
all alike, and breathed the
divine breath to vitalize their
earthly tenements, looks with s

favor upon none. Every faculty and function of the mind proclaimeth it, as surely as every physical formation fitteth one for Earth. He maketh no soul captive; but granteth it the freedom of the bird,—wings of spiritual power, on which it may soar to Him. The Earth attracteth naught but its own: it hath none other: the spiritual, likewise.

“If, then, these wings become rippled by sheer disregard, or lose by willfulness the strength first given, it resteth with the owners alone.”

The tranquil tones of my adviser carried a conviction that satisfied all previous wrestlings. Through all my flight his noble words had entertained the moments; until I held no calculation of Time, save looking backward, and counting given truths.

“The right and left of man,” he continued, “coincide with the right and left of action. Where

each leadeth, he is aware. indexed finger of a Power at points to one; that of a base groveling nature, to the other

So intently had I dwelt upon ourselves and revealed wisdom that I failed to perceive a landed band that rose upon view, like snowy blossoms on a bank of green. Among the flowers were ones I had seen before. In the sphere just left I had spoken with them; and a mutual greeting of previous companionship thrived upon the air.

All the beauty of Nature beckoned us. From nodding bluebell and pink-washed primroses, and from the shining leaves influences thrilled. A new land encircled us—an unexplored boundary of promise, interest and richness.

In each sphere animal life abounded. Golden bees hummed over honeyed flower-cups, and lowly-creeping insects enlivened the soil. My eyes were consta

attracted to dazzling iridescent hues flashed from the breasts, by the sudden winnowing, of birds—all varieties, every gradation of form.

From a dark thicket stately arose one with the beak and the outlines of the king of birds, its body covered with feathers that glittered in the light, like scales of emerald and gold, its course far above the limit of vision.

The downward flight of another revealed a gorgeous body and sweeping plumes.

Snow-white doves cooed responses to our own: but the tones were bereft of the sorrowing effect I had known on Earth; happiness was too supreme for any intrusion of grief.

Fluttering and darting among seeming wildernesses of orchids, creepers, and graceful air plants were tiny birds of kaleidoscopic hues.

Down in the tangled sedges,

silvery softness clothed others and the escaping light jeweled their plumage as they kissed the waters.

"Hast thou observed during thy spiritual sojourn?" And the silence was broken by one of my guides, his soft eyes resting on me in love.

"Doth not my face attest it, O holy one? It seemeth to have been molded every feature anew."

The successive periods of my awakening had been so gradual and so gentle, that the extent of my development had not consciously penetrated my being. But these interrogations recalled every scene, thought, and company into my mind; and with quickened tongue I spake:

"Unto me hath been given a wondrous journeying,—a flight that ceaseth not until the Highest be attained. This ambition of soul proceedeth not from selfishness nor doth it bear taint of worldly

display ; only the imbibed draughts of spiritual being, that resteth not until satisfied above."

"It is well," they replied ; "thy feeling needeth no reprovment. Instilled within thy breast shall it ever be, and prove a stimulus and delight, as in thy past. If two spheres attune thy soul and voice to such gladness, mark the indwelling of the ones lying afar. Gradation bringeth untold ecstasy and harmony, and affordeth meet discipline for the Noblest and Best."

With these words a valley was reached, dotted here and there with verdant vegetation and trellised flowering vines. Gray-blue mountains embraced it tenderly, as if screening it from the gaze of eager eyes.

We brushed through meres of yellow-tipped grass, that bent back lothly to their former slenderness. We could not linger,

even though a sighing like whispered pleading came from the ranks.

"Wilt thou attempt the ascent?" inquired my guide, as we reached the mountain's base, and perceived a clear-cut pathway serpentine on its surface.

"Where'er thy footsteps lead, I'll gladly follow, I," breathed my happy voice.

From crest and crag, bush and mountain blossom, tiny pearls of dew pended; and the air became purer, and more energizing; our footsteps as light as the fleet-footed chamois.

So gradually dawned the ascent so devoid of monotony, that, ere we were aware, the valley was far below, its spring-dyed green appearing a mere dot of color on the surrounding soil.

At many a step, our feet descended on pink-veined shells and wonderful forms of crustacean life, such as I had never seen

With a staccatoed motion, they bounded to the depths below. Myriads of pebbles, like discovered gems, lay in our path: but there was no yearning to possess or to gather them; their beauty contented us as it was viewed. Possession and avarice found no haunt amid such soil; in another clime they rankly grew.

At many a turning, steep precipices held ferns and wild plants, the rich green swaying in the freshened air. Even the waterfalls borrowed prismatic mists as they plunged below. The grandeur of a Divine thought and law was harbored within me at contemplation of this country.

At the summit, I looked about me, and found that this mountain was but one of many; that the mammoth cones darkened the blue horizon like sentinels of might.

Looking down, I perceived white forms beginning the ascent.

Singly filing, they stood on the dark mountain pathway, like a chain of pearls.

"Thither come they," remarked one of my guides, "spiritual seekers, that delight in this upward path, because it betokeneth every inherent thought and sequent inclination. Wilt thou remain and question them, or wing thy flight to another shore?"

I was tempted to remain, but *something* whispered "Come"; and I obeyed the monition.

"Let us away!" pleaded I; "a vision of another country seemeth unrolled before me; my longings urge me hence."

At my first words flight was granted me; and we waved farewell to the beautiful land.

I maintained a happy silence for many moments, during which thought was rife. No adequate expression could describe the fullness of my rapture since I had made acquaintanceship with this

existence. No conception could unravel the mysteries and beauties of the world through which we had passed; the eye and spirit were the truest comprehenders and attestors.

“Thou art meditating on thy flight?” said one of my guides; “and the retrospection bringeth thee pleasure. It can bring thee naught else in this element. Doth not my words reflect thy thought?”

“A hundredfold! yet the boundaries of the Beyond claim much of my dreaming.”

“Doubtless. Interest and thought, once awakened, never flag or die, or thou wouldst not be here. Thy zeal hath advanced thee. Be content.”

I soon perceived that our flight had become circling and downward. An immense plain had been traversed; and clumps of vegetation, fringing its limits, appeared.

A slowing motion, a gradual decreasing of the organs of flight—and we rested on the soil.

“Thou art in another sphere said my guides.





CHAPTER IV.

HEREDITY AND ENVIRONMENT.

THE country seemeth populated with children," exclaimed I, in wonderment.

From hedge and bramble, copse and thicket, they flitted in and out, singing and dancing until I was fascinated with their revelings. Through the golden light skimmed butterflies of varied hues; and the chasing, happy children kept pace with them.

Since my flight through the spheres nothing ungraceful or repellent had been noted. Only the beautiful, the useful, and the good existed; and the external satisfied the internal beyond measure.

Passing beneath a luxuriant jamine bower, the words "Re-awhile" were welcomed. The yellow trailings subtly wafted delicious fragrance to us, and twined about in mazy beauties. Upward glancings discerned tirewrens and twitting birds rustling among the leafy secrecy, or lirting saucily on graceful tendrils.

"Why abide so many youths within these inclosures?" queried I. "It appeareth to be an exclusive haunt for them."

"Before thee fly the souls of Divine Power liberated from earthly prisons. With no space for affection, sympathy, happiness or love below, he summoned them here. Through the vast treadmill of life are both happy children and waifs of misery. The most carefully-loved and nurtured spirits from infancy into youth, like tender plants housed within flower-abodes. For them attention, vanity, and luxury develop the m

terial beauty. The inner self is enhanced by discipline, love, and surrounding moral influences; they grow on fertile soil, and promise the flowers of life."

"I know many thus," murmured I.

"Far from such pleasurable abodes," resumed my guide, "another extreme dwelleth. The line of life reacheth from one to the other."

"But it seemeth a slur on Divine mercy and power to present such pictures as His creations."

"Nay," one replied, "the position in material life must differ for some purpose. The spiritual life is one power, one thought, one surety. That, as hath before been told thee, hath no prejudice to mar its beauty, or withhold Eternity from its wakened eyes. These waifs have as rich and fertile soil in the garden of the heart as they that are already deemed to possess it."

“Why, then, hath it been noted that children are brought by heredity into possession of morality or immorality?”

“Heredity,” assured my instructor, “merely consists in the aptitude of a child to receive impressions, be they for good or evil.”

“The fault, then, doth not rest with the child—with the infant mind that needeth care and cultivation?”

“No; but with the keepers of those souls.”

“Doth it not follow,” I continued, “that parents that have been likewise reared are exempt from the stigma of punishment?”

“Search through thine inmost channel of thought, and learn if any are ignorantly and sinfully created. Even an imbecile possesses a soul, that may not be discerned until the quitting of the material existence. Haunters of misery and vice are not devoid of *thinking* souls; they have the

knowledge to discern between good and evil."

"But is not the chain of evil too powerful to be broken?"

"Masses that abide in sin," explained he, "choose it from sheer idleness and banishment of will power. It becometh more difficult to loose these bonds, and obtain the freedom of true life. Wicked ones, surrounded by a healthful, moral atmosphere, often forget former pursuits and thoughts, and adopt their present mode of life unconsciously. When a wicked man discerneth the good, then doth it behoove him to turn. His knowledge of discrimination is the road to advancement."

Long I pondered the solutions of these problems of life and mind, obtaining firmness from their bases.

I was soon diverted from my thought by two passing children,—*maid and youth*,—whose silky

curls blended in harmony and beauty. Seeing me, they retraced their steps.

“Wilt thou join our company?” inquired they, sweetly. “Over in the meadows we sing and dance, and make merry all the hours.”

“Follow them,” whispered my guides; “they will also teach thee; thy soul will be loth to leave them if thou consentest now.”

With entwining hands I made one of the trio; and my steps assimilated with theirs in fleetness.

Out on the waiting silence rang the voices of childhood; and the sweet, flute-like vibrations were inhaled by the hiding echoes only to be returned again.

Everywhere I glanced I beheld happy children, blooming in this garden spot of Eternity, like the fair, fresh flowers brushed by their passing draperies. Characterized

into beauty: it lettered the rosy mouths and rounded chins.

"My chain must be made before another one is plucked," cried a winning cherub of tender years, carrying a lapful of daisies.

"Let us wait here," said she to me, "I will tell you something about the flowers. Do you know that they talk to me? say many strange things, and will scarcely wait until I go for them, and bring them here?"

In her possession were all varieties; from the tiny field-flower, to the creamy marguerite with glossy, sabled center.

"What do they tell you, little one?" asked I. "They never speak to me."

"How sorry I am! You cannot love them; for they always speak to ones that do."

It was a rebuke from a child; but it assured me of less insight than she, and a consequent dearth of true enjoyment.

“Why, they tell me,” she went on, too interested in the fragile blossom to notice the effect of her remark, “of everything! They are the eyes of day, and never look on anything but brightness; they whisper of lowliness, hope, and content, and look up to the taller and more beautiful flowers. The green grass loves them best; for it sways and talks to them, and hides them from us; just to be saucy, you know.

“Flowers are everywhere here,” she exclaimed, waving her tiny hands, “but I love most these small sweet ones.”

“I should, too, if they talked to me in that way.” And I fingered one caressingly.

“But they will, if you only care to listen!”

I peered down into the daisy-heart. The fringed petals starred the golden center, like radii of pearly light. And, as I looked, a face seemed there; tender and

pleading, with eyes bathed in dew.

“Can you see anything?” laughed the child. “Doesn’t it look like somebody?”

“Yes; perhaps that is because it has such an open look.”

“Perhaps,” said she, disappointedly; “I’d rather think, though, it was a face.”

“You would leave it then in its home, and not hold it with a cruel string.”

“But it does not hurt it! The flowers never fade here; they are always the same. *Someone* keeps them fresh and sweet for us.”

Ere this she had wound a chain of the dainty flowers about her dimpled neck, and suspended a swinging garland from her waist with childish glee.

As on Earth, the child’s idea was not one of destructiveness, but of restless inquiry—a longing to interpret the language, form, and beauty of the blossom.

“See,” exclaimed another, running to me, two curled pink shells within his chubby hands. “I found these near the shore, where the waves make music. I was watching the snowy-winged birds skimming over the waters, and I called to them to come nearer, nearer to me; but they flew far away, until it hurt my eyes to look for them. ‘Never mind,’ said the shells, ‘look at us.’”

“I held this one to my ear,” said he, indicating the larger, “and I heard faint music, as far as that blue sky seems. At first it sounded weak; then I became so still that it seemed nearer and nearer, until I bent my head and ear to catch every strain.”

“What did it sing, sweet one?” marveling at the kindling eye, the heaving breast.

“It sang of a home in the heart of the sea, where coral bushes, seaweed, and trailing flowers grow; where pearly fishes dart

here and there, or glide with the waves. I should like to see it all," said he, wistfully.

"But not to leave this beautiful land for that?"

"Oh, no! I could not stay there at all. But the shell told me so much, it almost made me see its home—the little grottoes of pink and purple shells, and the shining yellow sands where they rest. We are traveling, the radiant beings tell us, to a more beautiful home than this, far away to the eastward."

"I, too, am going there," said I, joyously, "and it is a glorious city."

"A city? Is it like this?"

"No, little one. There you shall catch the gleaming of golden streets, domes, and house-tops jeweled with gems of every color and size. Bowers of roses and lilies intertwine in luxuriant gracefulness, or nod from every garden-spot, wall, and path. Music thrills from each heart

and voice; one eternal joy is there."

"Oh," cried the boy, "take me now. I cannot wait."

"Me, too," pleaded the child with the daisy chain, who had noiselessly crept near me.

Then myriad voices rang out on the stilly air: "Let us go hence, now."

"Patience, dear little ones; not yet," uttered my guides, who had advanced closely beside us. "We will return for you after a while. Stay here and weave your flower chains; love this beautiful land, and you shall soon be journeying to another before you dream of it. Let us away," they whispered softly to me, "they will soon forget us. Children do not linger with thoughts."

And so it was. I cast a wistful look behind: they were laughing and pelting one another with snowy blooms that formed a shower of pristine beauty, through

which darted the rosy faces and silky locks of the cherubs, while the green sward curled in velvety softness round their dainty feet.

“Good-by, little ones of dawning soul-life,” my heart uttered. “Good-by for only a season.”

And with waving hands and a sudden uprising we left them.





CHAPTER V.

ETERNAL YOUTH.



MEMORY of innocent child life was with me—a communion so sweet, so soothing, that I breathed under a spell from which I was loth to awaken. I could scarcely conceive that the cherub forms, dancing eyes, and joy-brimmed hearts had been transplanted from some sorry garden spot of Earth. How they had thriven in this heavenly atmosphere! How the soul germs had pierced the earthly sod, and blossomed in the light of another world!

“Truly a divine thought is ever

at play," thought I; "unto the least of Earth He lends an ear."

"What claimeth thy silence?" questioned one of my guides. "It leaveth an eye serene, a smile so genuine that thy countenance reflecteth a new light."

"My dreams were of the children, in that past abode of innocence and beauty."

"Dost thou regret thy short indwelling there?"

"No regret is known to me, from the moment my soul winged flight; but the land just traversed is fresh and beautiful; every wave of thought concerning it maketh way for another; I seem to be renewed in the presence of youth, in the radiation emitted from them to me."

"Child life teacheth many lessons," assured one. "Content abideth with them; faith, innocence, and affection likewise. Restless they may be: that belongeth to the quickened pulse,

the tender years—but their restlessness accordeth not with the state of man; it is quiescent in comparison. They accept the moment's fruits, with no yearning for the future's store, no discomfort for the present's reality. Their lives remain equable by reason of their trust.

“In this soul life they happily abide until progress determines them on. The growth beginneth early; the stages of spiritual life are quickly passed. That land where they contentedly wait is a nursery provided by the Supreme Hand. There the germs bud, unfold, and wait transplanting.”

It occurred suddenly that in my flight through the spheres I had beheld no decrepit ones, no withered faces. Over each rested the bloom of perpetual youth. Sunken eyes, trembling hands, tottering steps were unobserved.

“Canst thou tell me,” I queried, “*why* old age is left behind, yet

the faces are easily remembered?"

"Those forms that thou hast viewed are spiritual—thou knowest, dost thou not?"

"Yea," I replied, wondering at my hitherto-darkened intelligence.


"Only material limbs grow weak, and steps totter," resumed the guide on my right. "The inclosed spirit knoweth no age, no weakening of tissue or of fiber. The mental faculties acquire new strength with fleeting days: only physical formation becometh impaired.

"Hast thou not learned of the culmination of intellect in some whose years numbered three score or more? of the wondrous achievements given to the world when the body was like unto parchment, the hair frosted with the snows of age? Will-effort, discipline, and courage keep the mind healthy. Only *the faint and disheartened* perish

from weakness, and allow the *mir* to keep pace with the body.

“Soon shalt thou view the one that passed away ages ago. To-day they walk with the vigor of youth. The grave holds the corruptible tenements of flesh; the liberated spirit treads the soil of another clime with elasticity and delight. It is springtime forever with them; the years change not their bloom. Immortality is the flower of the soul, perennial, perfuming, and beauty laden.

“Canst thou recall the zest of childhood, the eager step, the freshness of morning, and the never-ending joy? It dwellth now with them that have passed into their second youth. All their faculties are flowered and ripened. All the glow of new life, the knowledge of new attainments, shine in their faces. Old age obtrudeth not in the realms where beauty, strength, effervescing youth, and novelty abide.”



“Know they this truth on Earth?” thought I.

And my silence was absorbed by memories of the old that had passed away when I was there, of my own beloved friends and family. I had not met my darlings yet; their progression had been a rapid one.

The anticipation, and the varied knowledge I had just gleaned, kept my spirit in a state of beatitude, and I knew that all the physical pain, adversity, and trial suffered on Earth had only cultivated and richened the beautiful souls awaiting me.

I was assured that no trace of care remained, and they were treading byways of color and bloom, joying in one another's presence, and attracting me thence.

This thought brought longing for speedier flight. Hardly realizing, I advanced a little from my guides, who instantly checked me

with gentle pressures of the hand, and softly-spoken words.

“Haste doth not bring thee any earlier to them; thou must await our guidance.”

I started at the monition, and marveled at their intuitive knowledge.

“Forget my lack of gratitude,” exclaimed I; “much I owe to ye, blessed guides!”

Whereupon I submitted myself to their course.





CHAPTER VI.

A SPHERE OF HARMONY.

FROM the distance advanced undulations of sound. Now far, now near, beguiled they the aural memory.

“What glorious harmonies are those?” rapturously inquired I, my clasped hands and wondering eyes attesting my delight.

“They proceed from a sphere to which we travel,” they explained; “to a sphere where the souls of Music, Poesy, and Art abide. The character of that population will attract thee beyond assurance; will satisfy thine inward cravings.”

The words added fleetness to

my pinions; the sound-waves buoyed my listening spirit.

Before my vision a garden of loveliness stretched. Numerous pavilions, vine-wreathed and exquisitely architected, peeped through the glossy forest foliage, and cheered the distanced acres. Stately forms passed to and fro, clothed in soft, white raiment, palm branches in their hands; others fingered golden harps in ravishing measures.

Through the element wafted songs of praise, so adoring, so triumphant, that I fell upon my knees in ecstasy, while a crystal stream of joy moistened mine eyelids.

“Arise, true heart!” greeted one—a mighty spirit with a brow of broad, white beauty, an eye large and luminous with genius. “Come with me, and thine ear shall be quickened to vibrated melody.”

I glanced at the stranger. A

robe of trailing classicness arrayed his erect and dominant form. Where had I viewed that wondrous countenance?

Earthly memories absorbed, for a time, the spiritual; and a keen puzzling withdrew me from the celestial clime. My companion maintained a considerate silence. I felt that he knew the uppermost thought in my mind, and only awaited my inclination to speech.

We paused near a band of spirits, who bent the knee and head before my guide. Male and female were there: youths and maidens, men and women in their prime. I felt a thrill of tenderness as I gazed upon them—a sympathy and joy stronger than in any previous transition. Nobility stamped itself upon each brow; character and energy made strong each mouth and chin.

A whispered word or two from my guide, a majestic wave of his

arm—and a chorus of song swelled on the famished air.

Now a single voice legatoed a passage in a greeting tone, then another replied, and another, until the mazy measures wound in and out, softly swelling, gradually diminishing.

A pause ensued—a pause so breathless, so solemn, that the wondrous chord of strength that followed shook me as a reed.

I laughed, shouted, cried in ecstasy. I knew the Monarch of Song then—the great Composer whose melodies had been worded to heavenly themes—whose sacredness had lifted many a storm-tossed heart as the strains arose and trembled from chancel, nave, and cathedral cloister.

“Wilt thou join my band, and lift in unison thy voice?” earnestly invited he.

“A thousand times yes!” For my pent soul could scarcely withhold its rapture.

Again the Master waved his arm, again the soul-thoughts flashed to theirs; melody was renewed.

With a strength I had not known, an inclination and a desire beyond an earthly one, my voice uprose.

“Again, again!” demanded he, as I paused at the reality of my singleness of tone.

And the inspiration of his accents lent a warming enthusiasm to mine, an utter lack of self-consciousness. I knew myself only in an element that voiced my dreams—on a plane outstepped from earthliness.

As my song ceased I found myself surrounded and embraced by the listening throng.

“Remain with us!” they cried, “and dwell in a clime to which thy heart responds!”

My inmost thought clamored for assent; yet an attraction more powerful than could be expressed,

drew me onward, upward; and to their supplication I gave no immediate answer.

In silentness I remained. The vibrating waves of melody still controlled my memory; still throbbed, surged, and held me by their strength. The air seemed quivering with minor chords of pathetic import, which as suddenly glided into even, triumphant peals of melody. Each note lived in my sense: the memory was all-pervading.

Toward me a trio advanced. I felt their subtle potency before I had fully scanned their features, or realized their proximity. They enveloped me in their mighty personality, and I silently rendered with bowed head my homage.

"Thou hast only trod this sacred soil," uttered they, saluting me with kindness and interest. "Come where our haunts lie, and be one of us."

"Oh, Masters!" struggled I, in

startled speech, "deemest me worthy?"

And my extremes of feeling alternated with waiting doubt.

"We have learned and delighted," was their reply, "at thy advent into our midst. Each soul finds a character similar to its own in this clime beyond the skies: too gladly are they welcomed."

I looked askance toward my previous guide, to say farewell.

The distant shrubbery rewarded me with the faint white trailing of his robe. Behind him wound his tuneful followers. I kissed my hands in rapturous earnestness to their dimming outlines, and uplifted an eager assent to my new-found friends:

"I will tread, oh, spirits, wherever thy accents name!"

"Away then," outbreathed they, "to the heights afar!"

"Markest thou," indicated they, "with moving hands, yon upward

fleeing throng? They breathe the draughts of Heaven's air, they catch the wingèd thoughts of a power above,—rhythmically voice them to lyre and lute. Spontaneously singing, heart-echoing, they, living, adore; adoring, live.”

“Is it meet for me to sue for recognition there?” queried I, my trembling lids fringing my abashed cheeks.

“Elevation is meet for all,” answered one, “if it be attended by inward prompting and outward heeding. Hast thou not felt when on Earth, the soil loosen from thy feet, the envelopment of a form about thine own, and a removal from the ways and thoughts of earth? Hath not thy quickened tongue discoursed of inner forms and midway scenes beheld by thy spirit's eye?”

“Thy words unfathom my mind's deeps, yet thou hast not known me!”


“Still, we know ourselves; and

thy aspirations were then akin to ours: for whence would this attraction proceed, save from kindred souls?"

"Upon Earth," began one, "the glorious sense of vision was suddenly denied me, yet no darkness steeped my spirit. An endless procession of forms wound daily before my raptured view; with them I held constant intercourse. Panoramed on my inner sense were the wonders of the Universe, seemingly more gorgeous than beheld with the naked eye. From every shrub, leaf, and mineral rock soft voices breathed. My bubbling spirit testified its gratitude; and my hitherto lonely, harassed life passed to another stage."

I glanced at the speaker, whose sublime tones mellowed the air. In him I beheld the great scholar and breather of the Unseen—the word-painter of centuries ago.

"And I," added another, "gave to the world the most solemn and



awful mysteries of life, as they actually were. The age required it. By a mightier power than the sword, I conquered the arrogant and dissolute forces of man's nature; charactered thoughts that rose from my searchings throughout the world and its peoples. Ambition, Pride, the haunting horrors of Crime, Filial Love, the blessings of Adversity, Passion, Avarice, Imagination, Justice, Love, Pleasure—all were treated with truth and understanding. Some have denied me my birthright—purloined the echoes of my brain, and attribute them to another. Yet this day the world remembers and calls my name. My motives have been accepted and welcomed, praise be to Him!"

In the speaker's eye a fire kindled. The grand and knowledgeable face was stamped with the seal of innerness. I beheld the Seer of a bygone age.

With a feeling akin to awe, and

in my known inferiority, I clutched at the hem of his trailing robe.

Looking down, he extended to me his hand. The sudden contact infused a rushing force and power into my veins and fibers.

“Thine humbleness addeth to thy worthiness,” declared he; “but thou dost not need it near me. We are one band—alike in this celestial land.”

“Nay, mighty Spirit,” I protested, “I can testify to no record like thine!”

“Upon Earth,” reasoned he, “the same path is not taken by all. Diverging lines are followed by footsteps thitherward drawn, that finally merge into one heavenward tracing. Thou hast followed thine bravely and patiently; thy shortened life below left the memory ‘she hath done what she could.’ A resuming existence shall now be thine.”

In every helpful word true genius glowed. And with grate-

ful, joy-dimmed eyes I looked up.

The lips of the third in the trio were slowly moving. A far-away gaze bestowed, for a time, an intentness from which we seemed excluded—forgotten.

I bent nearer to list his words.

Why not? Something whispered, "They are for thee!"

"On yonder mount behold thine immortal comrades. Reality surroundeth them, yet Ideality still combineth and pictureth the haunts and lives in higher spheres. Every passing shade and emotion that their word-tones paint refineth more exquisitely the entire spirit: as the Depicter of Art filleth in the coloring of his dreams. Many ascend there that achieved success late in life that knew that 'late plants flower well'; which thought stimulated them to zeal. At the age of three score and ten I gave to the world a work pronounced my best. The winged

children of Fancy still swarmed before my vision, uniting their speech with mine."

He relapsed into musical lines in his early-English tongue, which seemed to quicken his faculties; and the quaint style revealed to me his identity.

"I know thee, thou Poet of a fame-producing country," I murmured.

And behold, the trio was complete in my cognizance!

Ages had elapsed since they had gone before; but the light of a greater intellect shone in each countenance, and physical beauty and strength seemed blended with the spiritual.





CHAPTER VII.

THE IDEAL AND THE REAL.

BY this time we were at the base of the mount. Two slender forms passed us, walking in close communion, their breathing intermingling in fragrant intercourse.

They turned, intuitively; extended their hands, and bade me welcome, then resumed their way.

Both faces were remarkable for purity and sweetness. On one a sensitive delicacy lingered; the other possessed more force and imperious power, which aspect soon succumbed to a native sympathy and earnestness.

“Thither walk knitted souls,”

assured one of the trio near me. "One, in youthful days, poured libations of soul to the masses. His beautiful imagery, delicate sentiment, and sensibility were rejected, scorned, and hissed by the multitude. The vultures of criticism preyed upon his frame, and life was extinct before their greedy talons were removed. Then the poet-soul dwelt afar.

"The other possessed a nature high and lofty, similar to the first. Both were replete with fire of imagination, strength of purpose, love of humanity."

"But the latter," interrupted I, "abjured belief in the Supreme Power and ideas of religion?"

"Nay," came the assurance of one, "he was tortured by doubt and inward wrestling. Through his many lines breathed moral excellence, sympathy, inherent love of a Creator. His words have sunk into the heart-soils of the race of men, and yielded the

fruits of purer living. Canst thou affirm his life a dissolute one, oblivious to every idea of morality and principle?"

"Nay," answered I.

"As his kindred soul suffered, so did he," resumed one. "He soared beyond the vision of the many. Now the eyes are stronger. Both names are extolled with trumpeting throughout the intellectual world. The beautiful lyrics have been resurrected from the dust. Each heart places an immortelle of fame at the shrines sacred to their twin memories.

"Oh, the blindness of the throng! the apparent chariness of favor and encouragement to those that boldly advance, and are prominent by individuality!

"When the ear is muffled to fame, when the eye is veiled in death, thither advance the belated masses with assuring favor, Justice still needeth weighing;

prejudice and ostentation should be graved!"

Strangely did the lament for genius move me. Its truth stormed the citadel of my spirit, entered and abode there, while "Honor to whom honor is due" was monotoned in its halls.

"Why is everything more keenly enjoyed within this atmosphere?" asked I, of one, knowing the zest of scholars in the material world.

"Because, on Earth, mere intellectual pursuits, pleasures enjoyed, talents realized, do not suffice for true happiness. There is a higher Ideal—the inner self; and every shade of sympathy, charity, and virtue bringeth more vividness of Heaven. The spiritual is the only true life.

"List to the pace of material steps. We pursue one thing after another, resume it on the morrow, and so on. What do the days bring? A beginning and an ending: for if those talents were neg-

lected for a day or two, loss would ensue, habit be unlinked, and stumbling interrupt the gait of every traveler on life's pathway.

“The requisite force is to unite the Ideal and the Real; blend the delicate beauty and lofty dreaming of the one with the earthliness and lowliness of the other. By so doing, life will be more meet for perfection in the Hereafter.”

As we ascended the mount, many illustrious faces were absent, their names unspoken. Where existed they?

The idea controlled me so forcibly that, in a moment, I voiced it to my guides.

“Ah!” exclaimed one, “the total darkness of immorality and vice has extinguished the flames of genius. In the caverns of Erebus their lamps are ranged. The oil is spent, the wicks heavy with blackened neglect. Words of divineness may have once emanated *from* the hearts of their owners;

but tongue to heart was untrue; and without perfect coincidence, immortality rewardeth not.

“The mission of such classes is a responsible undertaking. For mere fame, they sacrificed much; for gold, a disregard of conscience, and a trampled ideal: for words control the breathers, and are graven on the impressible tablets of some receiving minds with ineffaceable tracing. More potent are words in their characterized strength, than dulcet tones proceeding from lips of orators; for that that is seen of the eye findeth sooner its way to the heart than all the sounds vibrating through the avenues of hearing.”

The sageness of the speaker penetrated my thinking faculties, and an endless communion with him was my desire.

But the guides of my first flight, the ones with whom I had first been, approached me.

“The time for thy farewell draw-

eth near," they whispered; "other transitions await thine addition. Seest thou yon scholar beneath the oaktree's shade? What hast thou learned of him, oh, soul?"

"For the first time look I upon his face," answered I, in boldened interest. "Can his discourse fill mine ear before I bid farewell to this land?" For the rapt gaze of the throng about him, struck a keynote in my heart—attracted me thither.

Forward then we advanced. They perceived us not: eyes, ears, and other senses were in complete subjection to the Philosopher, who expounded the problems and laws of existence. Centuries ago his followers had breathlessly hung on his words: the same force held his present auditors.

My guides breathed his name into mine ear: but ere their whispers came, I had long since divined it.

"Wherefore standeth not this

one with the martyred throng?" queried I, recalling his sacrifice in life, the poignant cup pressed to his lips.

"His place belongeth there," was their reply; "but this sphere is still a field for his voicing convictions. Mark the intensity of his language, the truth-piercing sentiments, and flow of reason.

"Born and reared in a pagan land was he; yet, at a certain stage in his life, inward monitions impressed him to such an extent that they constituted the laws of his being. He felt a Supreme Power reigning within his breast. Its voice was The Voice until life closed. The welfare of humanity, and the restoration of light to darkened minds, was his daily endeavor. Through him the morals of the people were redeemed: the fascination of his arguments won them to duty's path."

"A noble life, and worthy," I murmured. "Would that more in-

herited such unselfishness; toiled for the higher Existence!"

"Thou sayest aright," replied another guide; "charity still needeth devotees; avarice, self, and ambition, exilement."

He ceased; and my memory still hearkened to the words.

"If I had but heeded the inner voice," I thought, "as earnestly as did that martyred one, what peace it would have brought me!"

"Our missions come in different ways," dreamed I; "none knoweth the extent and soil of the field in which they are sown, until certain steps have been taken."

I was recalled from my reverie by the clear incisive tones of the Philosopher, who again addressed the assembly:

"Know ye not, oh, people, that duty and charity still control and urge us to obedience? Gradations of spirit still await each indweller of the spheres; and the finger of faith points to the Highest. Let

us be up and achieving, knowing our course shall be attained the sooner."

The fiery directness of his zeal communicated its sudden force to the throng before him: a murmur of assent grew and grew, until it swept through the ranks in a single tone of enthusiasm.

I stood with the rest: his words had made me one of them—one in soul and desire.

"Come," whispered my guides, "thou canst carry these teachings with thee. Other worlds await thine incoming; and our instruction hath been to guide thee thence."

Through the by-ways and leafy thicknesses white wings poised in harmonic strength; wrought and chiseled by master hands that still knew the inspiration and rushing force of old, but in a higher degree.

Other beings caught the wonderful contrast of nascent light

and shade, richness of color and variety of forms, and transferred them to canvas—an imperative might!

Idleness was a stranger in that land: some influence urged all to permanent hand-guidance.

On all this talent, these wondrous achievements, I turned my back; not knowing, as in the past flight, which sphere pleased me best. Each held variety, yet in a higher unfolding.

Through my soul sped the thought of a Mighty one,—the Creator whose brain and hand had fashioned this marvelous Universe, and whose Spirit abounded with mercy and love to the ascending ones, and drew them by an invisible spell to his own abode.

“May I stand before the throne?” queried I; “in the shadow of His hand, the glory of His smile?”

“Fear not,” assured my guides, “thine hour draweth near.”



CHAPTER VIII.

THE LAST JUDGMENT.

AS our pinions bore us on in rapid flight, I wondered if time could be reckoned by minutes, hours, days.

“Only Earth’s creatures retrospect,” came an inner voice; “sad-eyed mortals that waken to sorrow, and find themselves seeking a backward view for lost flashes of happiness: not the creatures of light and dawning bliss: the time is theirs to live and to praise.”

Even though I recognized this truth, I could not refrain from reverting, ever and anon, to my starting-point—from the moment my

soul yielded to the call of immortal whispers.

Had the time been long? What if my flight and my absence from Earth were compared; would they coincide in duration?

Perhaps; yet my existence had been so devoid of monotony, so altogether absorbed and enlightened, that it seemed only a circlet of earthly days; while to those loved and sorrowing ones left behind, it must have been as the counting of many months.

Strange that a revival of their memories brought no sorrow to my heart. Had I become, in that supernal element, callous to grief?

“Not callous,” remarked one of my guides, who read my thoughts as an open scroll; “only resigned and trustful to a power above; assured of His mercy to bring thine own to thee.

“Grief hath no abiding-place in these worlds. It is a shadow that would blight the landscape’s hue,

the flower's blossoming, or dull the glancing eye. It rests where its natal morn beheld it ; where it clingeth to the garments of life's wayfarers, and is banished only by a holy visitant."

"What are the relations of the sexes in that hereafter?" asked I, my thoughts reverting to the loved one I had left on earth—whose agonized cry was in my memory, yet incapable now of sorrowing me.

"Neither marriage nor giving in marriage is there known," replied my sage adviser. "A peace and satisfaction resteth with all; and the passion of Earth is left on Earth. In this new home, love is immortal: being immortal, pure; and the baser soil that nurtured it when on Earth, is not known."

"But our loved ones: husband and wife, father, mother: how greet they one another?"

"In beatific newness, when the hour comes. They will be one in

purity and exaltation ; yet no discordant thrill of passion will sweep through their frames. The feeling cannot be analyzed. One must be there, experience it, know. Await the time ; let nature's unraveling lead thy thought from these wondrous spheres."

Wisdom tempered with love looked from his eye, as he addressed me.

It occurred to me that perhaps my queries were too frequent ; yet no warning to discontinue them fell upon mine ears. My flight had been like a scholar's : knowing something of each sphere, and the other life, had made it more keenly appreciated.

Like one that takes a sweeping survey of a page, and joys in the view, were my eyes awakened to a deeper insight of the world through which we had passed.

"Truly this probationary state charms as it purifies," mused I, "and the soul-life approaches

perfection as surely as the forming of a flower."

All the theories of resurrection, and its mysteries, that had been advanced on Earth, were now fallacies to my sharpened intelligence.

Having learned this, I craved discussion with my spiritual informers.

"Why doth the last judgment, and the knowledge of eternity, impress so unwisely the minds of men?" asked I.

"From too hasty an insight," remarked one. "What sayeth the words of the law? 'The hour is coming, in which all shall hear the trumpet-call.' Doth it mark an hour, a day, a year? Look thou deeply into its significance. The 'last day' meaneth the last day of the earthly life. Each soul then listeth the trumpet summons—setteth out upon its journey to the Eternal Bar.

"Canst thou conceive of that

which was formed of dust, lying in its narrow sphere, to be raised again at a latter day? Once consigned to earth, it becometh a part of its original soil. The spirit leaveth its tenement at once and forever; and the judgment day is the judgment day of each soul after its duration in the seven spheres."

"Clear are thy words, oh, spirit!" And marveling at such wisdom, I longed for further light. "Why seek not more fully the earthly ones for these truths?"

"One-half care not. With them the world sufficeth; and such queries are denounced as full of morbidity and gloom. They shrink in horror from a questioning; accept all told them without looking beneath the surface; and in their ignorance and blindness, pronounce the exploration of after-existence 'a presumptuous sin.'

"Others—scholars as they call

themselves—prefer psychology within certain limits. Misguided ones! Doth not spiritual searching surround life with boldness, and create a desire for the Highest existence?"

"Verily," replied I; and wondered at the bigotry of the masses on Earth, their monopoly of material searchings.

"Is it because few are brave enough to pursue a line of thought discountenanced by the world?" thought I; "and the reward it brings?"

I checked further meditations with a feeling of shame. Such thoughts were alien to a heavenly clime.

Yet I yearned to whisper to one and all of Eternity; of pleasurable abodes worth striving for; and with far more zest than the attainment of fame, the accumulation of riches, or winning the bauble of fashion.

An art pursued with goodness

of heart, purity, and faith, I felt to be commendable ; but not to be mere absorption, by vanity alone.

It seemed no marvel to me that some unloved, sorrowing mortals courted death. I felt that heavenly voices had whispered to them of after-joys which they longed to taste ; that the dearth of earthly love and hopes had prepared the souls for keener enjoyment in the Beyond ; they were restless to pierce the veil.

Then I knew of the forces that awoke in those lives ; of the material array that combated with the enemies of the spirit, and were victorious in the fight.

“With them true life is pursued,” was my silent conviction “every step, and crushed evil advances them to the goal ; and through struggle, hardship, and danger they attain Eternity.”

I did not question the Power that had placed them thus. I knew a great Wisdom and Merc

upheld them and foresaw the cultivation of their natures, the elements needed for true growth.

Imbibing these principles, I wondered at the skepticism of mortals that denied a Supreme Power, after-existence, and Immortality.

“How can they dare assert such beliefs?” asked I, impulsively, of my guides.

Strange to say, they replied at once. My thoughts, to them, seemed stamped upon my brow.

“They dare, because their whole natures are steeped in doubt. One doubt gives rise to another, and another, until not the smallest space knows aught of faith.

“They lose sight of the great force within, that causes every motion of the body to obey its mandates: the foot to travel, the hand to be raised, the eye to open and close. Volition is the strongest proof of an Omnipotent One.

“Doth a man invent a handwork to be perpetual or temporary? Is it a sight for a month or for years? Have time, thought and purpose been expended on an ephemeral whim?”

“Go higher, into the realms of mind. Hath a Supreme Power conceived the thought of man, his own image, as merely to live a brief span, die, and be numbered with nothingness?”

“A grain of sand is of perpetual use; blown from desert lands, it is added to the grains on the shore. One drop of water is welcomed by the ocean—assimilated with the being.”

“What then of a Soul? of that breath of divineness, that inner creation that knows more phases and depths than anything in the whole realm of Nature?”

“The knowledge is as clear as the noonday,” said I. “The darkened intellect needeth only to lift the veil of stubbornness. The

are not brave enough to tell the world if they catch one ray of light ; they fear loss of favor, and consequent scorn."

I bethought me of a great philosopher and atheist that, being summoned to the last tribunal, besought his daughter to pray to the God in whom she trusted. To him the light came late ; but it was there. It was one spark to guide the benighted soul through space.

In the distance I saw faint outlines of moving forms, coming after us.

"Whence come they?" asked I, wondering at their presences.

"From spheres just traversed," answered a guide. "They go, as we, to another sphere. In them, you see ones that have progressed in spiritual existence, and are passing to the last abode. Far removed are they," said he, waving his hand in their direction. "We shall reach another sphere before their advent."

Over fields of verdure we flew
In the distance we had left crowns
of oaks, palms, and ash trees
Nearer and nearer we advanced
a shore, where huge waves crawled
and lapped greedily its face.

As we reached it, we stood
a few moments in silent passiveness
and looked over the miles of water
surface, golden by the dazzling
sun-rays.





CHAPTER IX.

“HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE
FEET!”



“SEEST thou yon point of land?” indicated one of my guides, as we flew above a mighty deep, and beheld only a blue outline against the farthest outlook.

“The merest glimpse,” was my reply, straining my vision for a clearer view, and lending an ear to a probable prelude of its description.

“Another sphere lieth beyond,” assured he, “more radiant than any of those just traversed. Wonderful beings are there, whose accounts of past life shall delight

and elevate thee. With them time was most precious. Not a moment escaped recognition; the practice of time's true economy was a lifelong thought and accomplishment. A noble band, and a beloved one!" added he, softly, yet firmly.

I waited, hoping for further disclosures; but no attempt seemed evident. Checking my usual interrogatory impulse, by the hope of an early enlightenment, we pursued the intermediate flight in silence. The blue outline appeared no longer a thin dark stroke across the horizon's blue; it was a mass of land that assumed the shape of promontory, cape, and peninsula to my approaching vision.

As we flew nearer, vegetation clothed the perspective; and in the roaring and singing of the water's might, appeared a welcome haven. A long stretch of beach, then clumps of green dwarfed

growth, and, farther on, a white road leading through avenues of palms bearing luscious fruit, is what we now beheld. At every turning, boughs, inclining with palatable products, pleased our eyes. No beings were visible.

“Can the land be deserted?” exclaimed I.

Yet I knew my thought was erring, as I had been already told of the inhabitants.

Soon we left the white road, and, on foot, made our way to a distant grove where much of the sunlight was banished. Yet a soft haze rested there, and brushed with thinnest coating the earth-clinging foliage. It resembled a light that memory suggested—a light associated with a past decade.

This absence of day now became distinguished by tiny sparks that flashed, diminished, then disappeared through foliage and space. In appearance they were meteoric, and as short-lived. The number

increased ; the whole air seemed alive with tiny sparks of flame, like fire-flies among the wooded brush of Nature.

“ Ah, how wondrous ! ” And I stood with clasped hands, in transfixed delight.

“ What can it be ? ” was my next thought, remembering I had known no night, or going down of the sun, since my travel through this enchanting country.

No approach of evening was even visible ; for looking down on the ground, I discerned myriads of insects, stems, leaves of plants, and waving spheres of grass, with accurate vision.

Turning, I encountered the eyes of my guides, out of which gentle and amused looks shone.

“ Thou wishest to discover the cause of this illumining ? ” said one. “ Canst thou not conceive what maketh the brightness ? Perhaps some insect, some phase

of Nature, some electric vegetation?"

"Never have I beheld light so steely. But for the knowledge that night is banished from this land, I should say 'the lamps of Heaven have been lent us.'"

A shadow of a smile flitted across their faces as I emphatically expressed myself.

"Come," said both quickly; "thou shalt see for thyself."

And they lightly led me nearer, until we stood in a vast circular grove of palm trees, thickly planted, yet whose center left a comfortable space where forms were standing.

Others reclined in groups near the dark trunks of trees; and the white of their raiment relieved the somber backgrounds. In the bark, stars of brilliancy seemed embedded, like gems set in ebony.

"Thou knowest now," asked my guides, "what this light meaneth?"

“Yes, yes!” I replied, in alternating surprise and pleasure.

And I saw that each brow wore a diadem of stars that twinkle and emitted marvelous rays at each turning of the heads. The faces were mild and loving, yet possessed of great character and intelligence. Many looked familiar, and were facsimiles of the world's greatest ones.

“Are theirs only resemblances?” I pondered, “or is this the abode of His priests and teachers?”

“For every soul they saved God gave a star,” came softly voice in my ear. “The crowns have been won by earnest effort, charity, and blameless lives. They wear them well.”

“How beautiful!” And I looked more intently.

Some were moving toward us with pleasant welcoming in the outstretched hands—truest greeting in their voices. What lov

shone in their eyes as they rested upon us!

All bowed the knee to my guides, causing me to surmise their rank.

"Wilt thou intrust this soul a while to us?" asked they of my guides.

"Most willingly! Acquaint her with the knowledge of thy lives, thy advent here, and everything thou wishest to impart. She is passing through, and can add the charm and remembrance of thy sphere to that of the others."

Ere I was aware, I was moving away by the side of a company that led me along a serpentine walk, and down a sloping declivity to the cool seclusion of a winding stream.

It was so narrow that the trees planted on either bank formed a leafy archway for our eyes to travel. The sun, struggling through the branches, caused the air-bubbles and floating flowers to concentrate its golden light.

In some places the water was shallow, and eddied and gurgled with musical rhythm over huge stones, displaced, evidently, by attraction from the river bed.

"They recall to me life," slowly began one, pointing to the slippery surface of the rocks; "of the pathway of mortals, to whom destiny led my steps. At the first outlook they shuddered, and an unsteady foothold promoted deeper fear. But I fortified their spirit by words of the Law, by a promise of future safety and life; and they crossed the waters."

"Few below have courage to pursue an unknown and a difficult path," exclaimed I. "I recall many that gave up the attempt, either from lack of encouragement, or from sheer idleness."

"I fear the latter is the stronger cause. The world holds cords that draw many away from the brink of true life. Only they that possess an exalted ideal, an ele-

vated thought, a sincere desire for perpetual life will rise above the discords, temptations, and frivolities of Earth. Though surrounded by diverse natures, they throw off the yoke that those selfish ones seek to place upon them, and stand free and strong in the atmosphere of rectitude.

“Under my supervision,” he went on, “were many souls. I was appointed by a Higher Power to guard their steps, to lead them in the path I was treading. No one can estimate the hopes, prayers, and love I centered in them.”

“Rewarded they thy watchfulness?” inquired I, softly, noting his peaceful accents, his great thought of humanity.

“Only a few tried spirits.” And a great wave of sadness passed over his face, to which his next words gave interpretation.

“Some turned backward; saw and heard smiling nature and

beckoning voices; wandered far away from me and my little band. I yearned for them; besought a Power to attract their footsteps thither; but I have not seen them. The world was more to them than Eternity."

"It is the special duty of each shepherd to count and watch every member of his flock," exclaimed another, "words are weighty, but action is the surest safeguard. The many over whom I watched, came to me in trouble and distress. To all I lent a sympathizing ear: their griefs seemed my own, and my tears flowed with theirs. 'A shepherd loves his sheep'; and these souls, placed under my care, had each a share of mental devotion."

"Why are not more drawn to the higher life, to the beautiful fields above?" asked I.

"Because," said he, "some of the keepers of those souls do not adopt nearness and the true mea-

sure of salvation. They look upon their ministry as a duty to be discharged, without endeavoring to sow charity, handle character, and exhort by love instead of by fear."

To this opinion I agreed. For I recalled men whose lives, I knew, were blameless, but who looked upon those under their charge as they would at transgressors hardened in sin. With the power of a look or a word, they inspired such fear that those erring ones fled at a mere mention of their presence.

"Holy truths are to be expounded and dwelt upon," affirmed another, "but fear is not the influence to draw souls to One that is the essence of love and mercy. A poor sinner enters, perhaps, a house of holiness. Instead of gentleness, and words to relieve his storm-swept heart, his ears are assailed with a 'hideous hereafter for the sinner,' which

freezes his inclination to goodness, and makes him shun walls between which such sentences vibrate.

“Man should be reminded of punishment, but not so frequently. Speak ‘the greatest thing in the world’ to the masses; assure them of mercy always; win each one in friendliness and love. Do not pass them with dignity that turns them away: make each one feel like a brother or a sister in Christ.”

The eloquence of the teacher warmed me to enthusiasm. In him I saw the true lover of humanity—one whom a succession of sins by another would not discount.

“In him the fallen, the erring, the repentant had a guide,” I murmured. And I honored the great soul.

“Over there,” and he motioned to where one walked apart, with a thoughtful, downward gaze, “is a soul whose life was rich in love;

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who offered himself as a sacrifice for outcast and afflicted wretches; carried hope of immortality to their suffering lives; made them know that the souls their foul bodies framed were pure and capable of salvation; that at the last day they would arise in purity and in newness of life."

I scanned the face of the one walking near. It was a strong and an earnest one. In the diadem he wore, wondrous stars sparkled, and could scarcely be counted, so many were they. He walked as if still occupied with thoughts of those he had succored. His years with them were not buried ones; perhaps, in spirit, he was still with them, and advised as before.

"His name and works have been spread world-wide," declared I to my informer.

He bowed in assent.

"Too gladly shall I listen to that voice," was my assurance,

feeling it would be additional gain to my sojourn to know and love this immortal.

“Come,” called another, “we will go elsewhere, for many of our company walk beyond.” And he pointed to a path that led to a building in the shape of a temple.

Upon nearing it we beheld a broad portico flanked by tall white columns, whose architecture was relieved by designs of gold. Many entered at its doors; and we heard a voice from within of such mellifluous tones that it thrilled through every fiber of my being.

Joining those that sought admittance, we stood with them opposite an elevation where a teacher could be plainly viewed and heard. Eloquence rippled from his tongue; his powerful personality held the multitude at a glance of his eye; to them he revealed spiritual life and progress.



CHAPTER X.

THE ABOLISHMENT OF CREEDS.



“S it well to have a separate Belief and Law in the study of salvation?” asked I, anxious to clear my mind of a doubt that had long dwelt within.

And I looked around at the many assembled within the building, wondering if any points of doctrine disseminated amongst them.

“Hearken to me: then thou shalt decide,” answered my informer.

“All these belonged to chosen creeds. Now you view them as a class or body. No thought of

custom, ritual, or act divides them here. They point not, with pride, to an acceptance as the only true Law; they wrap themselves not with the mantle of fanaticism; but see in each other, as all earthly ones do, upward souls, attainers of one home, believers in one Supreme Power, and surety of one state. No Pharisee roameth here, to fix the cold eye of scorn on fellow-worshippers. A spirit of love pervadeth the assembly."

"But tell me, oh, spirit, why mortals cling so tenaciously to their own adoption of the Law; knowing, in a thinking degree, that such relations will be abolished there?"

"Many, I doubt not, are sincere in their fellowship and conception of course. They walk with all uprightness, practice love and charity toward their neighbors, and strictly heed the monitions of Conscience. They are liberal in thought of the Law, and let

not petty forms separate them in spirit.

"Others," and he sighed as if in yearning, "cling to a settled state with utmost selfishness; exclude the sinner as a contaminating presence, and shut the doors on the unfortunate ones that a word might raise from the dust. They give, and give largely, for the sake of religious advancement; yet retard their pace by stumbling-blocks placed by their own hands.

"Life should be a daily study. Trifles are the minutiae to be watched; for they join the links of habit, and become stronger in the march of Time.

"In a certain measure," he added, "creeds are provocative of discord. Many instances can be cited in the annals of the world below. Torture, death, ostracism has been levied on those that denied that they could not sincerely believe; and that in a Christian age, yet as bloody an

occurrence as when pagan gods and emperors ruled. Such imposers of tyranny have been wrapped in fanaticism until reason almost totters, and the courses they adopt are prompted by unsettled faculties thrown into confusion by love of power, selfishness, and greed.

“Afar walk ones that lived true lives,” assured he, pointing to a company of men and women. “Throughout all parts of the globe they planted themselves; away from home and kindred, in deserts of civilization, and perils and ills of the flesh. A divine Voice called them thither; an influence compelled them to speak with revealing tongues of such fire that darkened minds awoke, embraced truths that were ‘as lamps unto their feet.’ They have chosen the better way: see the acknowledgment upon their faces.”

I looked and beheld a goodly company, that were evidently

turning their steps toward us. The number of men and women was equally divided. As I learned their names and past deeds upon Earth, memory transported me to pagan climes and tropical scenes where the savage element was combined with man.

I thought of the alien ones that braved those unknown perils, diseases, and hardships; to whom no dissuasion brought a vacillating moment.

"With them the world was a field," breathed I, "and men's souls the seed sown therein. Prayer was the rain, hope the sunlight, that nurtured; action and will the powers of cultivation."

"It still goeth on," said they to me, as I found myself in their midst; "the good work ceaseth not there," and they pointed below; "and it will not until Time is no more."

The subject, and its past mem-

ories, lighted their faces. The world wherein they had dwelt was the sojourning place of a season, and they had striven to lead all men into the path they had trod.

I contrasted their lives, so full of purpose, with some aimless ones below; with ones that had plucked all the fruits of life, and beheld them turned, afterward, to ashes in their hands. I thought of the bitter unrest, the wearisome hours, the fevered rush of the throng, all in pursuit of momentary pleasure and a wild longing for newer scenes.

I recalled their horror of a Christian state, as something gloomy, depressing, and to be shunned.

"Life is as we make it," came their voices to my aural memory; "and it shall be happy."

Did they heed the sacred words: "Fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee"?


Ah, no!

Some retorted: "No soul have I;" thus classing themselves with four-footed brutes and dumb animals. Conscience became not a warning voice; their sophistries deadened its accents.

"Our life was peaceful there," was the sweet assurance of one—a young woman with a face from which enthusiasm shone.

"To watch the awakening of each hitherto darkened soul was a moment as awful as the bursting of the orb of day from the trammels of the gray dawn. I can see them now, those pagan people, loth at first to listen, distrustful of our good will and overtures of friendship; but yielding slowly, in an atmosphere of Christianity, to its doctrines, ere they were aware. Influence is a powerful force, thinkest thou not?" said she.

"Verily," I replied; "and undoubtedly to the masses. A few strong souls stand boldly out, and




push ahead by reason of their own soul-communion and convictions; but the throng are unwittingly led; and the leader must be awake to the responsibility of his position."

"Would that they believed and acted accordingly," came her rejoinder. "Love of humanity is not so common; self dominates, and the neighbor and his interests are forgotten."

"It is even so," I hastened to say; "and threatened to become more prevalent. As each age progresses in the path of requirements and scientific research, the sensibilities become more keenly alive to one's own joys; and a selfish exclusion is exchanged for previous sociality. Science should be linked with the cause of humanity, thus making it a golden end, and lasting pursuit."


"That explaineth," returned she, "the error into which some have fallen, who professed to read



and reveal the mysteries of character. Only in the rush of the world—the daily scenes of vexation, trial, and disappointment—can that sealed scroll be handled and unfolded. One may lead the smoothest of lives, as tranquil as a river current, above reproach and malignment; but such lives need occasional pinches of adversity, surrender by self-sacrifice, and probation of spirit to be reckoned high.

“They that have struggled and climbed, surmounted and ignored difficulties, maintaining, at the same time, a sweetness of temper and trust, are the truest ones.”

At the closing words I beheld my guides advancing. They, with an immense company, had left the temple, and entered a glen where we were resting. Positioned as I was, the coming throng represented, in their twinkling diadems, the face of Heaven on a soft summer night; for the groups were



as similar, and here and there shone resplendently a planet.

"Thy time is limited," suggested one of my guides; "a Voice hath bidden us ascend as soon as thy farewell be spoken."

"Hast thou learned aught in this sojourn?" questioned another.

"That that abideth with me is most valuable," was my heartfelt assurance. "Wisdom and grace are the pearls I have gathered on this shore, and shall carry with me."

"It pleasureth us," they answered, "to list thy words of appreciation. The noblest images of the Great One are here. Their converse is the result of years of thought-brooding and action. Their life was a voluntary choice; the better part that shall not be taken from them."

"Oh, life and its mysteries!" mused I.

For I thought of the various threads of destiny that were

woven at the cradle, and abided with us until the grave; of the way that attracted our feet, as the lode-star to the pole.

"It but proves," said I, aloud, "that each one has a separate work to perform in the march of Life. The voice that breathed into the ears of that company, 'Go into the highways and hedges,' was the Divine One of inspiration. It has spoken to me, to all thinking souls and alert intelligences."

"So live that thy record may be worth inscribing there," murmured one of my guides. "That is the injunction I would whisper to each soul below; for life can still be made happy by wise pursuit, and not a devotion to things pertaining to the flesh."

"It will come," spake another; "even now are mortals awakening to the significance of this truth. Experience and example have conquered their former inanity,



and something beyond earthly limits is what souls are now craving. Dissatisfaction and strife have done their work; their day of parasitical monopoly has gone. Excelsior is the motto of the world's people."

A grandeur rested on the speaker's countenance; a love so infinite that it passed my comprehension; for I felt it breathed of an Eternal mind.

"Good-by," said I, to the land we were leaving; "may the lessons and truths I have imbibed here but rouse more thirst for the spiritual and the country that lies beyond!"





CHAPTER XI.

SALVATION OF THE INNOCENT.

BY this time we were crossing a wide tract of land, the areas holding no sere, brown vegetation, no rustling decay, no loneliness in their apparent isolation. Every foot comprising the surface was covered with green grass. Life nestled under each blade; humming voices cheered the expectant ear, and bade one feel the joyousness of creation.

As far as the eye traveled appeared a level stretch.

“What lieth beyond?” pondered I; “more beauty, unravelment, and communion?”

Then the mystery that envel-

ops the future surrounded that far outlook. The pleasant retrospections of the spiritual existence but heightened my longings for the few remaining worlds to be traversed; and I impulsively spake:

“The next country—lieth it afar, and is it to westward or eastward?”

“Where mountain-tops loom grim and tall,” answered one; “where all the glory of a celestial sun poureth molten gold upon those sloping sides, lieth a valley of beauty and verdure. It is the cradle that the majestic mountains guard; it is the center of purity; for in it lisp and prattle the cherubs that were transplanted from Earth. In them thou shalt see the blossom of humanity, fragile snowdrops, that Time plucked and saved from chilling blasts ere they yielded to its force. As innocent are they as those tender blossoms, and sure of a heavenly state.”

“But can it be thus?” I questioned, tutorings of earlier years returning to clash a significance with theirs.

“Reason and decide,” answered one. “A child is born into the world—a being clothed in all innocence and dependence. What knoweth it of the tempestuous tumult of life, of scored sins, and weaknesses of the flesh? Every breath it draws is scented with the fragrance of innocence; the clear eyes mirror the beauty of the soul. Sinless, undefiled, it but verifies the words of One that said, ‘As a little child ye shall know them.’ Beloved by Him, dost thou wonder at their sudden and sure transition into a glorious state?”

I thought of the heaped doctrines concerning their salvation imposed upon mine ear when on Earth. I thought of the sorrowing mothers and fathers whose darlings had been cut down by

Time's relentless scythe, who held uncertain views as to their position in the Beyond ; while through this uncertainty they suffered all the torments their innocent ones were said to endure. My heart revolted, in sudden horror, at the thought.

“ If the world would but think, weigh, and analyze more deeply,” I thought, “ life would hold more cause for striving, be divested of the stings of disappointment, be more optimistic. Let one live with one's Creator as a power of Supreme Good, a Mercy that knoweth no failing—save to the persistent in sin. And let Faith pass on the wings of the Past, with its regrets and mistakes, into the Present, hovering steadily over our heads with her angel smile, beckoning in encouragement to the misty Future.”

I looked up from my reverie. Previous to this, my eyes had been closed by the deepening of mental vision, and our progress had been

unheeded. I found that the level stretch had been left far behind, and that a chain of tremendous mountains skirted the horizon.

Beneath our feet a valley slumbered, a spot elysian in beauty, and as fresh as the glad sweet fragrance of a Spring unfolding. Tiny forms winged flight toward us; baby hands passed shyly over our faces in silent greeting; while from time to time a silvery ripple of laughter brake over the waves of sound.

We were in the abode of innocence; the radiation from each form we felt with positive force; and the whole atmosphere was as sacred as that encircling a Holy of Holies.

“Speak to them!” imposed my guides. “They know speech here; youth is no drawback.”

And I did. Some intuition touched my tongue with queries pleasant; some conviction gave

me all the adaptability needed in that child world.

They led me everywhere: to sunny spots upon the sward where cooing tones attracted, and where dimpled fingers plucked the odorous flowers; to broad-leaved plants whose swaying cuplike structures held darlings light and dainty as those of fairy modelings. The breezes carried a lullaby into their ears; the slow sweet measure of distant harps accorded.

‘Oh, mothers!’ I thought, “could ye but be afforded a glimpse of this country, could ye but know the happy fate of your babes, ye could think of them only as transferred to fair fields and a glorious clime, ready to greet ye as ye are passing through.”

“These cherubs, remain they forever here?” asked I, wondering at the addition of years, the dawning of another period.

“Only for a short while,” replied one; “older ones are here,

and guard these timid wings, as the mother bird her young. See!" and he indicated a coming group that had passed the threshold of childhood, and that flew in and out by the side of these darlings of Immortality.

"Ones that have advanced from infancy," said another, "pass on into the last sphere, to the Eternal City, where they circle around the great white throne."

"But are they known?" asked I; "known to loved ones by this growth?" feeling that time's changes there were akin to earthly ones.

"Forever," came the reply; "a wisdom ordaineth it. 'Ye shall know each other there' has been wafted to nations upon Earth. Time delineates no marks upon the fresh, white countenance; the spiritual body only groweth stronger, and more capable of endurance; the infant soul becom-

eth a perfect pattern of the Supreme Image."

Just then a cherub came near me. On the head clustered golden rings of hair; the blue eyes were limpid and clear as a summer sky. In my hand it placed its tiny one, with all the trustfulness and innocence of babyhood.

The contact brought sweetest peace to my being; my fingers closed with sudden love upon those tapering pink ones, so small and fragile in their beauty.

I noticed that the baby-eyes found delight in everything; rested on foliage, sky, and flower with the utmost enjoyment. I could see that color attracted, as it did on Earth, and that variety of landscape tempted never-tiring glances. No peevishness or fretfulness marred the tender face; a serenity of celestial atmosphere rested on the countenance.

Stimulated and inspired by com-

panionship, I began a soft and soothing speech, as warm as a mother's to her child. The little one awoke in me remembrances of those I had left; all its purity and fragility appealed to my stronger spiritual sense.

And its answer came in bursts of delight, in soft affirmatives and chasing smiles that disclosed two tiny rows of pearls behind its rosebud lips.

At times, lisping queries were put to me—queries far above its years, and that on Earth would have been puzzling. Here, expansion of mind caused no hesitation of speech nor obscure explanation; into the baby ear I imparted clearest knowledge.

My guides had strayed far from me. I supposed them members of a distant group I saw vanishing behind a bend in the landscape. They had left me to pursue the tenor of my way, feeling, perhaps, that assimilation in this new sphere,

and with its indwellers, would be more direct.

As I looked around this fertile country, at the soul-love and peace predominating, I could not but think of the harsh disposing that had been awarded these spirits by earthly thinkers.

“If men and women that have lived in sin, repent, and desire a higher existence,” thought I, “and accept divine promises of redemption, to how much more are these blameless, helpless ones entitled? Can a spotless garment be acknowledged black? Can a bursting blossom be denominated wilted and smirched?”

I ran over, mentally, the diversities of human opinions: they were as many as soldiers in a fray, each fighting for victory. A certain egotism, I felt, conduced to their views a would-be pride in their assertions.

“Self, self, always.” And I grew mystified over the discovery.

I was roused from my dreaming state by a light rap on my shoulder. Looking round, I encountered the beautiful eyes of a maiden, who pointed to a distant grove, and said :

“Come, wouldst thou hear the praises of those thou hast met? It is a daily delight and offering to Him they adore.”

I assented quickly, and followed in her path.

From the spot she indicated, a chanting was wafted. It was silvery as a thread of sound; but pure, and marked here and there by shadings of soul-feeling. Some diviner inspiration had come to these little ones. If it had not been that, I should have marveled at their rendition.

With bowed head, and being thrilled with devotion, I stood until every voice died away, the holiness of the theme subduing all speech for many moments afterward.



CHAPTER XII.

SPIRITUAL PROGRESS.

THE mountains faded. Only a slight toning of color against the blue sky marked where their placings were.

Our flight was resumed. Higher and farther we advanced, until space was the only environment, outlook a mystery.

An attraction more potent than any I had yet known spurred me onward. Invisible ones seemed whispering in my ear; voices from the misty distance encouraged us as sweetly as if borne through silver trumpets.

“Knowest thou the land before thee?” asked one of my guides;

partly, I felt, to prepare me for its soil; partly, to discover whether interest had flagged, or a desire to retrace steps in past worlds was with me.

“No more than my mental vision unfoldeth,” was my answer; “but from previous conceptions more glory is to burst upon my sight; an infinitude of land that will not bear expression.”

“Thou canst not begin to conceive of its faculties,” said they; “even thy spiritual life, thy progress, will not aid thee in the knowledge; for that that is ordained,—stretched as a veil before thine eyes,—by it hope is quickened, faith made stronger.

“And beyond the veil? do they wait, the souls of those that call me? I have heard their voices; even now they are calling still. There is joy in their tones—a sound as of unrestrained emotion. It seemeth one bound will take me to them.”

“Not one bound, nor several,” admonished one; “but an allotted time, a traveling counted by degrees of spirit. Behind that veil many stand waiting; a glorious company, whose song ruleth each hour, whose glory knoweth no abating, who have completed a spiritual cycle, and rejoice therein.”

“And can this be the last sphere?” I queried, in a transport of joy. “Am I nearing that home—the golden shore beyond which all the wondrous beauty lies, where the eye and heart never grow weary?”

“Thou shalt soon learn,” answered they. “It is not given, even to a spiritual one, to know all at once. Thy traveling hath proved this. How couldst thou dream of standing immediately before that One whom the Heavens obey, who guideth the planets in their orbits, and controlleth light and heat!

“Thy spiritual eye must ap-

proach cultivation like a bud opening to the glory of the sun. The process is slow ; thine ear must be attuned to harmony through the medium of the senses. Then the brightness shall not dazzle thee ; the awful majesty of those tones shall serve but to strengthen thy own."

"What great ones stand there? Can any have attained perfection—perfection to merit an immediate place in that world?"

"It shall be given thee to see and know," replied one. "Thou wilt know them all : beings clothed in light, in majesty, in righteousness."

"Who draweth near?" asked I, feeling, at the time of his speech, the potency of some onward-coming one, long before the whirring pinions were audible.

"What aideth thy question?" queried the guide on my right; "thou canst not see in this misty ether ; and sound travels slowly here."

“Only that that constitutes my inner faculties. I have known it on earth, yet in a minor degree.”

“And what calledst thou it there?”

“A link between mind and mind; a force begotten by inherent qualities in both perceptions.”

I turned involuntarily. Through the cloud-enveloped distance something was visible. The outlines were dim. I was not near enough to discern whose personality so engaged me.

“Surely it is a soul that bears a close relation to me!” was my earnest utterance; “a soul that has followed me thence, and is winging its way with mine.”

Just then a voice arrested mine ear. A call—no more—and by my side a form flew, over my hand another one lay; and I beheld a parent—my father.

“Ah, child,” spake he, “the way is now mine! Progress is

sure, and we enter the gates together.”

A great joy shone in his face. A wave of exaltation buoyed every word. And in full-felt ecstasy I clasped tighter the hand holding mine.

Although in wonderment at this meeting of a soul that I had felt to be long ago where I was trending, yet I refrained from questioning, or submitting other than a look of perfect faith and love to the eyes so long withheld from mine.

On the way we discoursed of all the wonders of my upward way; of that that was to follow, and the hope of all future reunital; of the other ones awaiting us, whose voices we inwardly heard, toward whom our quick pinions were bearing us.

“Didst thou dream when on Earth of such flight?” asked my parent, looking at me with a wonderful light on his countenance.

“I could define it only as a dream; only as a baseless fabric whose floating unconnected texture could not be woven into clear conception. Theories have been many; but none approach this realization, this marvelous transition.”

“One half hath never been told,” he replied. “Some have not the desire to hear; others lack patience; only earnest ones yearn and believe.”

“Yet it is affirmed that many behold, as the soul is passing from its tenement, the eternal glory.”

“Only a brief glimpse,” rejoined he, “or why this traveling through space, this soul-knowledge? That that the eye sees at the closing of life is only a flash of the radiance that is to follow, a preparation and a hope for the newly-fledged pinions.”

I recalled my own flight, from the time when the struggling soul escaped its tenement and floated

into space. All other souls had traversed the same circuit, and this was the end thereof.

Looking round I beheld happy faces about me, faces radiant with the realization of Eternity. I knew then no greater reward than to pass with them into that Beyond, to which our thoughts were hastening.

And while we were nearing the Eternal Shore one thought went back to Earth, a thought of the toilers there, into whose lives ran lines of discontent and ignorance, weaving the warp and woof of a garment heavy as one of lead.

“If it may be given them to know,” mused I, “this own tongue shall discourse of that that has met mine eyes and filled mine ears.”

To which my parent replied, with soul communication :

“In such conclusion a great love speaketh, and Earth may bloom as a garden plucked of weeds.”

. No word came from my guides.

I felt that they knew and understood the import of my thought ; for some silent acquiescence spake from their lofty brows.

And that moment saw our flight brought to a sudden descent.





CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE REALM OF THE KING.

STANDING on the brink of the river, whose broadening mass rolled gradually upon our sight, we paused as if in hesitation.

“Rest here a while,” said our guides.

And with the word we obeyed.

I suddenly observed that the bank whereon we stood, was rapidly peopling with forms whose advent had been unperceived.

They too, like us, must have traversed the same circuit, in whose misty element they had been rendered invisible.

At a beckon and a call from my guides, they came toward us.

In the company moved many I had known, whose presences I was overjoyed to see. On every countenance expectation, blended with perfect trust, was delineated. No doubt assailed one among that number. The way was clear, the river would be crossed, and afterward——

“I catch the gleaming of a golden tower!” exclaimed a raptured soul; “see, on the other side, its point is visible!” And her slender hand indicated the object viewed.

Between verdant shores the river ran; and forms and objects were discernible on the other side.

At a signal from our guides, inspired by a long sweet trumpet-call from the adjacent shore, we uprose from the bank, and began our flight. The river was clear as glass, and in many parts shone like crystal, certain spots catching iridescent gleams, among which we beheld our floating forms.

We were nearing the shore; and beyond all that mass of bloom and verdure, beyond grove and bush, rose peak and tower, wall and parapet of a city, whose every architecture was made of gold. At the first look, our eyes quivered; but, as in the darkness one's vision gradually becomes stronger, so, in this bewildering light, did repeated looks become likewise.

"Seest thou one upon the bank?" inquired our guides, as we reached the shore.

"Yea," we replied; "he seemeth waiting for our band, and hath come outside the gates to welcome us."

"Nay, his place is always there," instructed another guide; "seest thou not the gates are closed, and he walketh before them as a sentinel?"

At closer view we observed the stranger.

He was clothed in a long white robe, and in his hands he held a

ring of golden keys, giving to him an air both responsible and majestic. He looked up as we advanced, and before him we made obeisance.

“Let us enter, we pray thee, good Saint,” asked our guides; “we travel to the City, to the Eternal resting-place.”

“Hast thou charge of these souls?” inquired he, sternly.

“A charge of love,” replied our majestic guides; “a charge made faithful by Him above, to whom we can manifest all love and rejoicing.”

“Pass within.” And he unlocked the massive gates.

Back they swung as if on hinges of wax. We passed into a way bordered with myrtle and rose, lily and violet, whose fragrant emittance was more pleasing to the sense than any yet known. The air quivered with melody; a thousand vibrations held our thrilling selves.

Toward a hill, from the summit of which all green and flowering arose a temple, we traveled. A wondrous attraction drew our footsteps; and half in marvel, half in awe, we advanced.

A great glory, stronger than the sun, seemed in the air; in whose intensity our vision gradually became submissive.

Once at the base of the mount, we looked upward. A throng of white-robed figures crowned the summit. With lyre and lute, with harmonious voice, they swelled a song of praise, and, in everlasting homage, bent the knee.

"Who are these?" I asked of my guides.

"These are they that have come out of great tribulation," answered one; "the redeemed, the glorified, translated into sudden and eternal glory."

"And to whom sing they?" For in circles surrounded they some

One; in song they made triumphant the air.

"Thou shalt learn for thyself," instructed one.

And I followed, with our band, in his train.

"Holy, holy, holy!" arose from the tuneful hosts. And the melody was like unto a single voice.

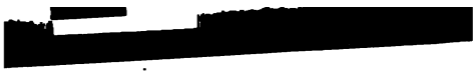
"Holy, holy, holy!" came like an echo from our band.

And in the midst I heard a voice all tuned with love and mercy; a great light brake upon mine eyes; prostrate I fell before the King.



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